

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Burt Hiroshi Ebata

"Looking back on our store I regret like hell that I didn't help my father more, you know. I was too busy playing sports, like that. Even my high school days, yeah? I used to go out to take orders whenever I come back from school. Go into the camps to take orders. Mostly Japanese customers anyway and I didn't go around too far, but there were enough homes in the Japanese Camp."

Burt Hiroshi Ebata, the third of nine children, was born August 11, 1913. His parents, Seiroku and Rii Ebata, owned a grocery store in Kōloa's Japanese Camp. As a youngster, Burt worked as a delivery boy and performed other tasks in the store. The store closed in 1932.

A life-long resident of Kōloa, Burt attended Kōloa School and graduated from Kaua'i High School in 1932. He then worked for Kōloa Sugar Company for three weeks as a hāpai kō man. After being laid off, he worked as a parts salesman for Kaua'i Motors in Kōloa. He remained there until his retirement in 1978.

Today, Burt enjoys gardening and traveling. He lives in Kōloa with his wife, Asako, whom he married in 1943. They have four grown children.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Burt Hiroshi Ebata (BE)

February 27, 1987

Kōloa, Kaua'i

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Burt Ebata on February 27, 1987, in Kōloa. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, why don't we start by having you tell me where you were born and when you were born.

BE: Yeah, I was born in Kōloa in a plantation house that was located right behind what is now the First Hawaiian Bank, and my father [Seiroku Ebata] was already working in the Kōloa Plantation Store. And I was the second boy, in fact. My older brother, I don't know how many years older he was, but let's see now, he was maybe about four years older than I was, I think. But before me there was my sister who is now Mrs. Okuda. And then after me there was another sister, Kii, who is now Mrs. Honda. And then after that came Tetsu. Tetsu was born five years after me. And after Tetsu was Kimi. I can't recall how old she is but must be a couple years after Tetsu. Then came Asao, then Betty, that's Kiku, and then Yuki (Dale). I think we moved back in the camp and my father started this store on his own after being kicked out from the plantation after the Japanese strike. Of course the reason, my mother used to say, was that he was active in the strike.

WN: Which strike was this?

BE: The Japanese strike.

WN: Nineteen nine [1909]?

BE: No, I think the big Japanese strike was 1920, I think.

WN: Nineteen twenty [1920]?

BE: That was in Honolulu, but I don't know how active the Japanese workers here [i.e., Kaua'i] were, but anyway, she mentioned that after the big Japanese strike then he got canned, you know.

WN: You were born 1913 so you were seven years old when there was that

strike. What do you remember about it?

BE: I can hardly remember anything about that strike. But anyway, I remember my mother saying that oh, was a bad time too because she mentioned something about the big bonus that all the plantation people were getting. Of course even those days the sugar price used to go up and down, and I know, 1920, that Kōloa Sugar [Company] I think gave out about almost half a million dollars in bonus to the workers, you know. So here we were, people getting good bonus and we were out trying to start a new life.

WN: So as a result of the strike they were giving out the bonuses.

BE: No, but, well, the price of sugar was way up so. . . .

WN: Oh, I see.

BE: I remember my mother always used to say that was really hard luck for us to be starting out all new. And of course that was the only thing he knew about, running a store. Anyway, he was lucky to be able to rent this building which was bigger than usual so we could use about one-third for our home and then the other two-thirds for our store [S. Ebata Store]. And this building was, oh, a matter of about thirty or forty yards away from the M. Sueoka Store which was already well established in the camp.

WN: Which camp was this, what was the name of the camp?

BE: This was the Kōloa Japanese Camp. And you know, it's where the Grove Farm subdivision is right now and, well, it's the area right back of where the First Hawaiian Bank and Kōloa Jōdo Mission is today.

WN: Your father, do you know when he came to Hawai'i?

BE: No, I don't know when. Of course, we have the record, but I don't know when he came to Hawai'i right now. Of course, I've answered that (chuckles) question many times, but I know that his McBryde Sugar [Company] contract was in 1899.

WN: So, when he came to Hawai'i, where did he live first?

BE: Well, I think he lived in 'Ele'ele, which is McBryde Sugar. I think that was his first area.

WN: So, when he was involved in the strike, where was he?

BE: He was in Kōloa already. Yeah. So I don't know if he had fulfilled his contract with McBryde and then came to Kōloa or what. But I know that he wasn't at McBryde too long. Most of the time he was in Kōloa.

WN: So you said that he was kicked out as a result of the 1920 . . .

BE: Well, that's what my mother said.

WN: Kicked out of where?

BE: Kōloa Sugar [Company], as a plantation store clerk.

WN: Oh, I see.

BE: All I remember about his connection with Kōloa Sugar was that he was a plantation store clerk. And he could read and write English, so. . . . I don't know when he had the time to learn all that, but anyway. . . .

WN: Where was the [Kōloa] Plantation Store at the time?

BE: Well, it's right where the First Hawaiian Bank is today.

WN: So right near the store that he . . .

BE: Yeah, so we moved back, maybe about a hundred yards back. And that mango tree in front of the bank [today] was the same mango tree that was there. I remember that mango tree. So, I know until the store inventory came in he, my father, had a horse and buggy, and then I used to accompany him to Po'ipū Beach to pick up watermelons for sale. I don't know, (chuckles) I don't know what the price was at that time but must have been really cheap, you know.

WN: You mean there were watermelon farmers going . . .

BE: You know, I can't recall their names, but there were I know Japanese. The area what is now Sheraton[-Kaua'i] Hotel was all sand too. [The watermelons were] growing in the sand.

WN: Did they grow other things besides watermelons?

BE: No, I can't recall that, but I know (chuckles) that place was full of watermelon vines, the patch was all watermelon. So I don't know if they had other kind of farm crops.

Looking back on our store I regret like hell that I didn't help my father more, you know. I was too busy playing sports, like that. Even my high school days, yeah? I used to go out to take orders whenever I come back from school. Go into the camps to take orders. Mostly Japanese customers anyway and I didn't go around too far, but there were enough homes in the Japanese Camp.

WN: How many homes do you think were there in the Japanese Camp?

BE: Boy. . . . See now. . . . Maybe about forty homes I think.

WN: And then they had the Filipino Camp and other camps, were there boundaries between them, or how did you know . . .

BE: Not boundaries, exactly, but either the plantation arranged it that way or, you know, they seemed to be all lined up in their certain area. Portuguese in the back, yeah. There was a Korean Camp too, but I don't recall too many Korean families. Maybe only about half a dozen, I think (laughs). And then Chinese, well we didn't have any Chinese camps. Most of the Chinese that I knew were merchants. I don't recall any plantation laborer, you know, Chinese. Of course, maybe there were a lot of Chinese in the early days, but mostly Japanese here. Not too many Filipinos in the early days anyway.

WN: What other stores were there besides yours and Sueoka near the Japanese Camp?

BE: In the Japanese Camp I think we were the only two, I think. Then in Kōloa town itself, there was the Tao Store, and later on there was the Okumura Store. . . . And then much later on there was this Oyasato Store. . . . Then below Okumura there was the Usa Store. . . . Then of course we had Japanese restaurants; Okutsu Restaurant way up near the [Kōloa] Plantation Store.

WN: Is that the same family as the manjū?

BE: Yeah, yeah. They're famous for their Okutsu manjū.

WN: So they started in Kōloa then?

BE: Yeah. Only a few yards away from the [Kōloa] Plantation Store. And then we had this Kikuta Restaurant right in Kōloa town.

WN: How did your father acquire the land for the store and your house?

BE: Well, that was rented I think, from a Mr. [Manuel R.] Jardin [Sr.].

WN: Who was Mr. Jardin?

BE: Well, he owned property in the Kōloa [Japanese] Camp. I don't know how many acres but, a strip of land anyway. And it happened that he owned the area that my father rented. I understand that he later sold the property to the plantation. But anyway, we operated the store until 1933.

WN: You said earlier that you used to go to the different houses to take orders. What did that mean? What did you have to do?

BE: Well, you know, we had a general merchandise store so I would take orders for, let's say, takuan, which is a staple Japanese food those days. And rice. Well, we had this codfish which was more or less a staple food for Portuguese, but Japanese used to buy that too, you know. Dried codfish. Of course I can't recall the prices, but every family ate codfish. Not only Portuguese. Then we had seaweed, konbu they used to call. Seaweed, came in rolls. Well, there were a lot of Japanese food you know, but canned food. . . .

Was a lot of food stuff we had for sale, not much dry goods, you know. We had dry goods store in Kōloa town itself. Like Sasaki Store. . . . And Isonaga Store, well, they had dry goods too, but I think they sold medicine, like that. More specialized, you know.

WN: So besides food, what else did you folks sell?

BE: Well, we sold slippers, like that. We sold oil lanterns. . . . In the old days, getting back to slippers, they had this what they call geta, yeah? Made of wood. . . .

WN: Did you sell like work clothes?

BE: I don't think so. But I recall, we had lot of rice. I think they were hundred-pound bags of rice. A lot of rice, a lot of scratch feed for the chicken. I recall that being all stacked up. . . . What else? And then of course, in those days, what they call tsukemono came from Japan in big barrels, yeah? Even the takuan, oh maybe they were that long, (indicates length with hands) the takuan.

WN: Two feet long?

BE: Yeah, about this long I think, takuan. And they came in a big barrel about this size, so many of them in there, coiled up in there.

WN: So about what, [the barrel was] two feet in diameter?

BE: Oh yeah, bigger than that, I think. This big and this high.

WN: Oh, about two feet high?

BE: Yeah. Came in that kind of barrel.

WN: Those things from Japan, where did you pick them up from?

BE: Well, the Honolulu firms used to send salesmen over every month, see? I remember Hiyama Shōten, and Sumida Shōten, but there were a lot of Japanese firms that sent their salesmen over. Let's see now, that's all I can remember right now, but. . . .

WN: Did the goods come to Kōloa Landing?

BE: Yeah, they came to Kōloa Landing. I don't know how often the boats came in, but I know they came in and then landed maybe a few yards out, you know? And then they unloaded on the rowboat and then the rowboats came into the dock. And then they had the steam engine that would pick 'em up. That's how they used to unload the freight. And then Kōloa Plantation had railroad tracks running to the landing. So they pick up their freight by rail.

WN: How would your father pick up the freight?

BE: Well, in the beginning it was--I don't know until what year but--horse and buggy, you know. And then we had a Model-T truck. And then I remember in 1929 when the Chevrolet Six came in we bought a Chevrolet pickup. But I don't know when they phased out Kōloa Landing because Kōloa Sugar Company started to send in their sugar to Port Allen. Of course, those days the sugar was all by bags, you know, not bulk eh? They bagged their sugar. And that's the reason that they phased out the Kōloa Landing. I don't know what year that was.

WN: I think it was the early '30s. Early 1930s?

BE: Well, maybe it could be about that time, yeah. Either that or late '20s. [The last recorded use of Kōloa Landing was in 1928.]

WN: So when you went out to take orders, how did you do it?

BE: Well, most time I went in the afternoons. The people were back home from work, and I used to walk and go. And then I remember my kid brother Ted---eh, Tetsu. He went too. Some days I know he was sent out. And I think he liked it, but I didn't like it.

(Laughter)

WN: Why?

BE: Well, I think I was. . . . More bashful, that's why. You know, I felt just like it was an obligation if I asked people to buy from us, you know (laughs). And we didn't have sales those days, so you know, the price was the same every day. (Laughs) So I was kind of ashamed, (laughs) ashamed to go and ask for business. (Laughs)

WN: How would you ask them?

BE: Well, I would tell them---I would name certain stuff. If I knew something new had come in I would mention, "Oh, today I have so-and-so, that's new."

And yet I ended up my life as a salesman.

(Laughter)

BE: Yeah, I started out 1932, and then I retired in 1978. My whole life was a salesman, although it was [automobile] parts.

WN: But you know Sueoka probably had people going out taking orders, too.

BE: I remember only Mr. Muranaka. Yeah, he was [Mayor] Tony Kunimura's uncle. As I recall he was the only salesman they had. He went out, you know. But he was a good salesman.

WN: But what about the plantation store?

BE: Yeah, Kōloa Plantation [Store] had, oh, maybe half a dozen salesmen going out. In the beginning I recall mainly Japanese salesmen but, later on they had the Filipino salesmen, Portuguese salesmen. I think they were all either by wages or. . . . I don't think there were any commission salesmen, you know.

WN: So you would go out---you knew exactly what houses to go to?

BE: More or less we knew, we had certain customers. Of course, I don't go to the same places all the time. We knew who, more or less, [were] considered our customers although they bought from everybody else. But, certain homes I never did go. And of course, it was all credit.

WN: How did it work, the credit?

BE: Well, at the end of the month, eh? You would send the bill. I recall very few cash sales. Of course if a stranger came in, then he had to pay cash, but. . . . People we knew, they were all charge sales.

WN: Did your father have trouble collecting sometimes?

BE: Oh yeah, lot of poor accounts. Because he used to go to the Po'ipū area. Lot of Hawaiian people, hardly any Japanese those days. Then of course, as far as Māhā'ulepū, well, they had a camp those days. So over there we had Japanese, some Puerto Rican customers, too. Then we went into Hulē'ia Camp. We had the Kīpu Plantation. There we had even Filipino customers besides the Japanese. Then on the west side we went as far as a place called 'Aipō Valley, which is halfway between Kōloa and Lāwa'i. Well, only a few homes there, about ten homes, I think.

WN: Did you go Kukui'ula side?

BE: To Kukui'ula, no. I don't know if my father went, but I didn't go to Kukui'ula. Although we knew some Japanese families over there. Because Kukui'ula had a Kukui'ula Store, you know McBryde's [plantation] store, Kukui'ula branch. But I know other firms sent their salesmen over there.

WN: Did you help your father deliver the groceries, too?

BE: Well, as far as delivering, well, like maybe on Saturdays like that when I had free time. But I know that I didn't hustle in the store itself, you know, when I should have.

(Laughter)

WN: Who did a lot of work in the store? Did he have paid employees?

BE: No, no. My mother and my father were the only ones. And I don't recall how much help my other brothers and sisters were to the

store. Of course, they must have helped but. . . . Yeah, looking back, you know, I wondered how he managed with a big family like that. Eight kids.

WN: What was your mother's [Rii Mitobe Ebata] role in the store?

BE: Well, she was just a housewife, so, she used to be in charge of the store when my father went out to take orders like that and. . . .

WN: Try and describe the store. What did it look like inside? How big was it, first of all?

BE: Oh, let's see. . . . I think the total building was little bit bigger than this building here.

WN: You mean this room?

BE: No, I mean . . .

WN: The whole house . . .

BE: . . . this whole building, yeah. And our living area was about this size, maybe a little bit bigger.

WN: So about, what, this is about twenty by forty [feet]? This would mean you're talking about the house, the living area?

BE: Yeah, in that building.

WN: Small! (Laughs)

BE: Yeah, really small.

WN: And you had nine of you?

BE: Well, we had eight kids. That's ten altogether.

WN: Right. So where did you folks sleep?

BE: Well, we slept in the back and the front, too. I don't know when we started to sleep on beds. . . . Oh, let's see now. . . . I know we didn't have enough beds for everybody. Some of us had to sleep on the floor, on the mat.

WN: You know the shelves. Could anybody just come in and pick something off the shelf in the store?

BE: In those days there was no self-service, you know. We pick out the stuff ourselves. And we had a few glass cases.

WN: So a customer would come in and say, "I want this and this," and you folks would . . .

BE: Yeah, we would get it. We were lucky to have a carpenter who lived right next door, see. A bachelor named Okamoto. So if we had any changes that we wanted inside, well, easy to tell him to do it for us.

WN: What kind of things did you used to do as a kid to have a good time?

BE: Well, games that we played those days. . . . Of course, one of the most popular one was baseball, but we used to make our own balls. Bats we made from hao bush, and balls, well, we used twine for the core and then we wrapped around cloth. We made our balls like that.

WN: How did you prevent it from unraveling?

BE: Well, in fact later on I'll make a ball for you and then I'll show you how it was done.

WN: Okay.

BE: Pretty good balls, too. That was very popular, and then of course we had softball.

WN: Were there areas in the camp that were there---was there a field in the camps that you could play . . .

BE: Well, yeah. . . . There was a place near the Portuguese Camp. And there was pasture. I don't know if this pasture belonged to Jardin or what. Beside the Jardin home there was a big pasture area that we use for our park. And then in the area that's now the Kōloa Post Office, that used to be the Kōloa ballpark. It's now covered with weeds and all that, but well, used to be a pretty good-sized ballpark. The senior league used to play over there and we played there as kids. Then of course the school had a good playground. So that was baseball, and soccer. The kids never picked up on soccer until recently, but we used to play soccer. And we used to fly kites lot of the time. Make our own kites. . . .

WN: What did you make the kites out of?

BE: Well, we used to get bamboo. . . . Bamboo framework and then we used what they call hanshi, which is a Japanese thin paper that they used to write on. We used to paste hanshi together. Sometime we used newspaper. And we made pretty good kites. And then when the Filipinos started to come in they made lot of nice kites. Of course we wrestled a lot, too.

WN: Do you mean sumo? Sumo or regular?

BE: Well, (chuckles) I think that's regular sumo style, I think. Not contest, but. Although they had sumo contest for the men, the kids used to, not teams, but we used to wrestle.

A lot of camping trips down the beach.

WN: What was the beach area like in those days?

BE: Well like, Po'ipū Beach for example. That was lot of kiawe trees in that area. Hardly any buildings. But there was an abandoned home on the Po'ipū Beach area. Of course we didn't use that. But the Po'ipu area was our favorite as far as camping, like that, you know. Pioneer Club.

WN: What is a Pioneer Club?

BE: Well, of course they had Boy Scouts, too, those days, but the YMCA used to operate Pioneer Clubs for grammar school kids. And then of course they had Hi-Y Clubs for the high school kids. Like when I was a freshman, I was a delegate to the Hi-Y Club conference they had at Camp Kokokahi. I think that was in the Kāne'ohe area.

WN: It's still there.

BE: Camp Kokokahi. Well, our main base was the Nu'uanu YMCA, and we used to go by steamer and then walk up to Nu'uanu YMCA from the pier, carrying our luggage. I remember that. (Laughs) I think it was 1929.

WN: So the Pioneer Club was affiliated with the Y?

BE: YMCA, yeah. We had a man named Mr. Watada who used to be the YMCA representative. He used to come to Kōloa School, and in fact he married one of the Kōloa School teachers. Miss [Aiko] Nakao. I don't know who operated the Boy Scouts, but we had Boy Scouts, too, those days.

WN: But you weren't a member?

BE: No. No, I don't know why, you know. Maybe the YMCA had a better recruiting policy or something like that.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay, we were talking about things you folks used to do as kids, yeah?

BE: Yeah.

WN: What else do you remember?

BE: Well, I know that we used to go up the mountains to get mountain apples, you know, mostly in the area behind the Waita Reservoir, which in the old days they used to call the Marsh Reservoir.

WN: Had a lot of mountain apples over there?

BE: Lot of mountain apple trees, yeah. And then what we used to do was wrap them up--lot of ti leaves, too, in that area--so we used to wrap them up in the ti leaves and then bring them home. I don't recall taking any bags or something to carry them back with, you know. Always ti leaves, so we took time to bring them back.

WN: So what, you would make baskets out of the ti leaves?

BE: No, we used to tie them up individually like that.

WN: Oh, I see.

BE: Yeah. . . . Then of course, we used to go and pick mangoes, even Java plums.

WN: What is a Java plum?

BE: Well, that's a popular kind of plum that grew to about, maybe one inch in diameter. It has a sweet--not very sweet--but it was sweet enough when ripe, you know. When it was ripe it was all purple and, in fact it was black, almost black outside. But inside it was pinkish-purple and kind of good tasting. If you ate too much then, you know, kind of you get choked. But you can eat about a dozen, you know. Was the size of about a kumquat, about this size. And then they have the American plum which looked the same but it was real sweet. And I remember the plantation manager's yard they had a tree like that.

WN: Did you go into the plantation manager's yard?

BE: Yeah, I remember when Mr. John T. Moir was manager. And, he had a son, John T. Moir III. They used to call him "Junior" those days. And he had something that was rare, for us, because he was the owner of a Shetland pony. And we used to go into his yard to see the pony. Well, I think that yard was about a couple acres, anyway. Big, big yard.

WN: Where was the manager's home located?

BE: Well, it [the area] is now called the Waila'a subdivision. That area is west of the Marsh Waitā Reservoir. You see the Waitā Reservoir is in that direction, just like that, then there's a small hill separating the reservoir from the town. There's a hill, and then this manager's home is right here. And then the Grove Farm subdivision is all in this area like that.

WN: So it's west of Waitā?

BE: Yeah. You haven't been in that area?

WN: I went to see Waitā.

BE: Well, okay. Maybe later on I should drive you to the Waila'a

subdivision. . .

WN: Oh, okay.

BE: . . . and point out, you know.

WN: Oh, that would be good. Speaking of Waitā, did you folks go fishing or do anything in that reservoir?

BE: Well, they used to have a man that. . . . What's his name now? Herman Steljes. I don't know if he was a camp policeman or what his title was, but he used to keep the kids away from Waitā Reservoir. [Steljes was a luna for Kōloa Sugar Company.] You know, kind of restricted area, but we used to go to catch goldfish. And---of course they used to have big 'o'opus in there. I remember one time Waitā dried up and they had huge 'o'opus in there.

WN: By "dried up" you mean. . . .

BE: I don't know what caused it, maybe the drought or something, eh? And the water went down to maybe only a few feet. And they used to have lot of. . . . What they call that fish now? The one with the, the (BE points to his chin).

WN: Catfish.

BE: Yeah, the catfish, you know. Yeah, huge things about this big.

WN: A foot and a half?

BE: Yeah. Big, big. . . . I know the Chinese used to like catfish. But the 'o'opu, boy that was good eating. So fishing was a big form of recreation for us.

WN: Was there 'ōpae too?

BE: 'ōpae, yeah. But 'ōpae was mostly in the mountain streams. Like in the Maha'ulepū area, we used to catch 'ōpae in the plantation ditch. They had big ditches, you see. The main ditch, yeah? And there used to be lot of 'ōpae, in those ditches. Then, of course, some of the boys went frogging. Lot of frogs, but I don't recall eating frogs until I became an adult (chuckles). But I know the young kids used to go frogging.

WN: What about swimming?

BE: Yeah, we used to go swimming. I don't know what the name of the stream is [Wailana Stream], I can't recall the name. We even swam in Waitā, too. And the river that runs along the Kōloa Fire Station, well, in the old days the plantation used to have the railroad track go into the river and then they picked up so many carloads of seed cane. Of course, seed cane came in bags those days and they used to soak them in the river. After elementary school, we used to go over there,

used to swim in that river. And then at the same time we used to sometime rip the bags and then take the seed canes to chew.

(Laughter)

BE: Yeah. We used to go to Japanese[-language] school, too, those days, and they had early and late classes. And students who were in the late class could take time off to swim in the river, see.

WN: Where was the Japanese[-language] school?

BE: Well, it's on the area that's---well, in fact I think some of the buildings are still there, right besides the Kōloa Hongwanji temple. That used to be the Japanese[-language] school. And it was operated by, I think it was by the Japanese community, but the staff consisted of the ministers of the Kōloa Jōdo Mission and Kōloa Hongwanji, plus a couple of outsiders like Mr. [Koremitsu] Muraoka. . . . And there was a Mrs. Sasaki. So the school teaching staff, about maybe five teachers altogether or something like that. And they had from first to eighth grade, you know. Of course they had a lot of good students, but in my case, I wasn't too interested but I was forced to, like everybody else. (Laughs) Of course, I regret now that I didn't pay more attention to my Japanese because would be real handy now, you know? I even went to night school. That was much later on though. One-hour night school.

WN: What, to take Japanese?

BE: Yeah. Then of course we had night school at our temple [Kōloa Jōdo Mission], but we were more interested in conversational Japanese, not the technical side too much. We wanted to know the proper way to talk to people at the funeral and all that kind of stuff.

WN: Getting back to the river you used to swim in, was that Waikomo Stream?

BE: Well. . . . You know the one that I mentioned about the seed cane being stuck in? They used to refer as the Wailana River.

WN: Yeah? Just like there are two names for that river . . .

BE: Yeah. Wailana. Maybe up to a certain area it's called "Wailana" and maybe after that it's "Waikomo." Because there's a river that ran through the---you know the old Kōloa Mill used to be across the what is now the Sueoka Store in town, yeah? And there's a small stream that's running right over there and then there's a bridge that . . .

WN: By the Salvation Army.

BE: Yeah. That's a continuation of the same river, stream, I think. Or either that or it connects to another stream that comes down from 'Ōma'o, I think. Yeah, that's right.

WN: Well, right where the old mill was, that's where---wasn't that where 'Ōma'o Stream merged with Waikomo? Or something like that?

BE: That's right. Right above the mill, you know. Yeah, that's right. Because the one stream [Waihohonu Stream] came past the fire station and then the other stream came from 'Ōma'o. Came right there, that's right. And there's a dam over there. Small dam, that's right. ['Ōma'o Stream and Waihohonu Stream merge mauka of the old sugar mill site to form Waikomo Stream, which flows to the ocean. Old-timers also refer to Waikomo Stream as Wailana Stream.]

WN: And then it would continue all the way to the ocean?

BE: Yeah, um hmm. Then right below, a matter of about fifty yards below Sueoka Store, there's another dam.

WN: This is the present Sueoka Store, not the old one?

BE: Yeah, the present Sueoka Store. That's right. And that went down to Kōloa Landing. That river [Waikomo, a.k.a. Wailana Stream] emptied into Kōloa Landing.

WN: You know the railroad that started at Kōloa Landing, where did that go?

BE: Well, I know it went to the mill.

WN: The new mill, huh?

BE: Yeah, the new mill. They had the railroad tracks all over the place. I know one that came past the Japanese[-language] school, you know, because maybe about a hundred yards back they had the plantation warehouse. And there were railroad tracks right in that area, because right near the warehouse was the main station where in the old days all the laborers gathered over there and then they rode the cane cars to go to work. Oh, maybe about five o'clock in the morning, I think. Kind of early, anyway. All the laborers gathered over there. And then those that were assigned to Māhā'ulepū, well, they went on this train. A lot of the people went to the working area by train. I don't know when the trucks became important, but in the late 1920s, anyway. And I know in the beginning they had trucks with solid tires, not pneumatic. And one popular truck was the Pierce Arrow. And then of course, another one was the Moreland.

WN: So the trains were used for both cargo, cane and people.

BE: Yeah, that's right. Because I know when we were kids, Dr. [Alfred Herbert] Waterhouse sponsored picnics at Po'ipū Beach, you know. And all the people were transported by train. The plantation would donate the services of the train. From Kōloa we would be spinning around to Po'ipū Beach.

WN: Did you ever go on these picnics?

BE: Oh yeah. I think the date was July 4th. It was a big event those days. They had lot of games and free soda water. July 4th was a big holiday when we were kids.

WN: So it was more or less the whole town, not just plantation?

BE: Oh yeah, yeah. The public was invited. And then when trucks became popular I remember when we were kids, plantations used to take out trucks to transport people to go and see senior league baseball games, to other towns. All the plantations, they had good---they were very active in the sports program. Until the union came in [1946] anyway. And then when the union came in they dropped all that sponsoring of sports like that. But until then, yeah, they went all out for sports.

WN: Each plantation had a. . .

BE: Yeah. See like---I remember Kekaha Sugar [Company], they had this fellow, [Henry] Hughes. I think Hughes was a graduate of Oregon State. But he was supposed to be a good athlete and I know like Kaua'i Pine[apple Company] they had [Bill] "One Arm" Baker. He was their sports director.

WN: "One Arm" Baker?

BE: Yeah. From McKinley High School.

WN: He had one arm?

BE: Yeah. And he used to play baseball and football for McKinley High School.

WN: Oh yeah? How did he play baseball?

BE: (Laughs) I know he attended Weber Junior College, and he was a very good athlete. In fact he came to our YMCA convention. And there was Red Raymond. Red Raymond used to be a super athlete for McKinley High School, you know. And Su Sun Kim, he was a super basketball star for McKinley High School. Bob Naau. I remember all of them came to that YMCA convention.

WN: I want to get into the sports a little bit later, okay? I want to ask you, you said Dr. Waterhouse used to sponsor these July 4th picnics. Who was Dr. Waterhouse?

BE: Well, I don't know actually what his name was, but Dr. A[lfred] H[erbert] Waterhouse. I think he was the Kōloa county physician. But, he had a private practice and he owned lot of land in Kōloa, in fact this area here was all Waterhouse property. And even today he is still owner of what is Old Kōloa Town. So, Dr. Waterhouse is connected with missionary families that settled in Hawai'i a long time ago, and in fact he was one of the really kind people that lived here in the old days. Yeah, he was really a philanthropist.

And let's see, I think his father was a former mayor of Pasadena or some city in California. You know where the Kōloa Missionary Church is? Yeah, that used to be their home at one time, and then, of course, he had his private practice in there, too.

WN: If you were a plantation resident you could either go to the plantation hospital or Dr. Waterhouse?

BE: Well, I think he was the plantation doctor, too. They had Kōloa Hospital. In fact that building is still there, I think. Right across from where the Kōloa Missionary Church is. That used to be the old Kōloa Hospital grounds. And he was a physician there too.

WN: Do you want to go get a drink of water?

BE: Yeah.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, what about other holidays or community-wide celebrations in Kōloa when you were a kid?

BE: A big event for Japanese anyway, was the Emperor's birthday.

WN: Oh, Tenchō-setsu?

BE: Yeah, Tenchō-setsu. Of course, the school had lots to do with this but I think the whole Japanese community joined in to sponsor One important one was the sports event, eh? They had the track meet and of course we played ball, like that. I think they had wrestling too, but I wasn't too sure on that. But I know they had track meets.

WN: Where did they have the track meets?

BE: Right in the old Kōloa ballpark. So that's going to be right below the school, eh? Right near. In those days they had people come in to sell foodstuff like that, you know.

WN: What about like New Year's time?

BE: Oh I can't recall New Year's time. I know that was a big holiday time, but. . . . Well, kids used to play with firecrackers like that, but. . . . I don't think as far as other kind of sports, you know. . . .

WN: Let's see, did we finish up on talking about what you folks used to do as kids? Is that about it?

BE: Well, I guess that's about it, yeah? Of course something that we looked forward to was the movies, those days. No talking pictures, but silent movies. They had serials going all the time, and I think the admission was either ten cents or five cents. They had

Shinagawa Theater which was located right behind what is now the [Kōloa] Ice House. I don't know what capacity it was, but that theater was right in there. And then we had a plantation theater [i.e., Kōloa Theater] which was operated by the Kōloa Athletic Club, and that was right besides the Kōloa Japanese School area. And later on this theater was converted into a gymnasium because a new theater was built right across where Sueoka Store is now.

WN: Where the old mill was.

BE: Yeah. I think that was built in 1936, I think.

WN: That was the one that eventually burned down [in 1971].

BE: Burned down. I don't know if it was burned down, but. . . .

WN: Was this the one that was operated by Manuel Teves?

BE: Yeah. I don't know how he became the owner. Manuel Teves was the office manager at Kōloa Plantation. But I know he became the owner. I don't know when that happened, but. . . .

WN: Well, anyway, what we're going to do is, we're going to stop over here and then if we do this again and we cover things like the organized sports in Kōloa, more description of the town, your work at Kaua'i Motors that you started in 1932?

BE: Right.

WN: More about Kōloa School, and other things like the union, changes that have taken place in the town. We'll cover that next time.

BE: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 15-9-2-87

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Burt Hiroshi Ebata (BE)

April 1, 1987

Kōloa, Kaua'i

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Burt Hiroshi Ebata on April 1, 1987, in Kōloa. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

BE: During high school time, in fact when I was an eighth grader, I played barefoot football for one year for the Lāwa'i team. And that's the year that they challenged the east side champions, I forget what team it was. We used to be members of the Pioneer Club up until then, which was sponsored by the YMCA, and we used to have our own teams, but not on an island-wide basis, you know. We would pick our opponents and challenge them. When I became a freshman, I was a member of the Kōloa barefoot team. And we were members of the Kaua'i Barefoot League. Boy, I don't know, I played barefoot football until about just before the war, I think. That's a long span for a (laughs) man that's already working, yeah?

(Laughter)

WN: How many teams were in the Kaua'i league?

BE: Well, almost every town had a team, you know, those days. The league was pretty well organized, and it was the 125-pound league, and it was popular. Games on Sundays drew a big crowd all the time.

WN: Where did you play the games?

BE: Well, like in Kōloa we had our games at the---well, in the beginning it was at that field which is now occupied by the post office. That used to be our playground, see. And then later on Knudsen family donated the park which is now, near the fire station, the Kōloa ballpark [Knudsen Park].

WN: What kind of equipment you folks had with barefoot football?

BE: Well, in the beginning we just had helmets, of course we had jerseys. Now I'm beginning to think who paid for them. I can't recall whether some firm paid for them or the plantation or, you know. Until the unions came in, plantations were really big in

sponsoring sports. So they provided transportation and all the equipment, like that. In fact lot of the plantations had sports directors. And I remember two of them, like "Honolulu" Hughes. I think he was an Oregon State graduate. Henry Hughes, but they used to call him "Honolulu" Hughes, and then of course he was at Kekaha Sugar Company. And "One Arm" Baker, Bill Baker from Weber Junior College. "One Arm" Baker used to be a star athlete at McKinley High School, then he went on to Weber. And he was the sports director for either McBryde or Kaua'i Pine, anyway. But. . . .

WN: "Honolulu" Hughes was Kōloa?

BE: No, Kekaha Sugar Company.

WN: Who was Kōloa?

BE: Oh, I can't recall any. . . . No, I cannot recall Kōloa. But anyway the plantations all sponsored teams.

WN: What was the name of your team?

BE: Kōloa Plutes.

WN: Plutes?

BE: You know, Pluto, the god of rain, eh. The rain god, because it used to rain more in the old days, as far as I can recall. So it was the Kōloa Plutes.

WN: You said one year you played for Lāwa'i?

BE: Yeah.

WN: How come you played for Lāwa'i?

BE: Well, their manager saw me practicing at the Kōloa field with our Pioneer Club team, and then he saw me kicking the ball, so they needed a punter. So that's how I joined their team. So I played in the backfield for them.

WN: Well, what about Kōloa, you couldn't play for Kōloa then?

BE: Well, that year we didn't have a team in Kōloa.

WN: Oh, how come?

BE: The following year, we started our own [team]. So I played backfield, halfback, and later on I played end. And 1937 was the only year that we took the championship.

WN: And what? After you take championship, do you go to Honolulu to play or anything like that?

BE: I can't recall going to Honolulu, but anyway before then we used to have home-and-home arrangement with Honolulu teams. I know we used to go to Waipahu, play the Waipahu Jackrabbits. I know we played Hinode Kai. I don't know, that's near Makiki, I think some place around there.

WN: Who was your coach?

BE: The year we took championship, 1937, James Tashima was our coach. He's a hometown boy, but he used to work in the Lihue bank, First Hawaiian Bank. And another year we had John Nishi, who used to play senior league barefoot football in Honolulu. He was our coach, too. Now who else. . . . We had a guy named Harry Abe, he used to be our coach, too. Harry Abe was maybe only about 125 pounds, I think, and he used to play in the senior league against 200 pounders. He was a quarterback and he was a good passer, too.

WN: So to play in the 125 league, you have to be under 125 pounds?

BE: Well, yeah, they allow about four pounds for equipment, like that.

WN: And then if you're over that, you play in the senior league?

BE: No. They had another 135-pound league.

WN: And that went up to, how much, 150?

BE: Ah, I don't think they had a 150-pound league, but after the 135-pound league, the next step was the senior league, the big heavyweights. And those, no limit, you know. You can be 125 and if you want to play, like Harry Abe, he used to play. But he was a tricky player, so they couldn't pin 'em down.

WN: So did you have pads too? Shoulder pads?

BE: Yeah, we had shoulder pads, but not in the beginning. Afterward we had shoulder pads, helmets. . . . Well, jerseys all the time.

WN: So who was the overall sponsor of the league?

BE: Well, I think the publisher of The Garden Island newspaper, Charley Fern. I think he was the most important man, as far as pushing this league. Anyway, football was his favorite anyway. I don't think he pushed baseball so much, but football, yeah.

WN: So besides football, what other sports did you play?

BE: Then I played---we had a AJA [Americans of Japanese Ancestry] Baseball League. And we had a team, I think it was 1929. For several years we had a AJA team over here. It wasn't a good team, you know.

(Laughter)

BE: But there were quite a few outstanding players, you know. Like this fellow Takehiko Tashima, he attended UH for a while, but he was a very good pitcher, and then a good hitter, too, see. And he was a big guy. Later on he became a policeman, and then he died early, I don't know what was wrong with him, but anyway he was a good player. Then of course, before our senior league, not our grade, but the plantation senior league, we had James Kondo, you know we talked about him a while. University of Washington graduate in electrical engineering, and he was a very good player.

WN: And those games were played also at that park? Knudsen. . .

BE: Yeah, uh huh. (Knudsen Park was used later, but in the early days the games were played in the old park.) As I recall, those games attracted pretty good crowds. A lot of interest. Well, in the old days when the plantations were still active in sponsoring sports, they had Filipino leagues, too. A number of the towns sponsored Filipino teams, and they had good players.

WN: Did you folks ever play each other?

BE: No, not that I recall. I think football and baseball were the biggest sports. Of course, we played basketball among the Hi-Y clubs during high school days. But basketball wasn't that popular yet. Like in Honolulu, McKinley High School was the champion all the time, and then Hilo High School was the champion all the time in Hilo, and they had good teams. . . . But now I wonder why they never used to shoot one-handed like they do now, yeah? Always you have to do it with two hands, like that. (Laughs)

WN: Yeah, set shot.

BE: Yeah. And yet the way the pros are playing now, it looks like the one-handed shot is better.

WN: I don't think anybody shoots with two hands anymore.

BE: Oh, yeah. I don't know why that took so long to catch on.

WN: I'm wondering, did Kōloa have a gym?

BE: In the beginning we used to use the Kōloa Union Church. Actually it was a church, but it served as a gym, too, during our Hi-Y days. Then the plantation gave up the theater and they built a new theater in front of [the present] Sueoka's. Then the old theater was converted into a gym. So we had that place to play basketball, too, but it wasn't a regulation-size gym. Not too many regulation-size gyms, anyway. But on Kaua'i, the big games were held at the Līhu'e Armory. They had a armory in Līhu'e in what is now the Līhu'e Shopping Center, in that area, where the county buildings are, you know. Right around in that area they had a big gym. That's where all the big games were held.

WN: We were talking about the Kōloa Athletic Club. Do you know who sponsored that?

BE: Well, in the beginning I think it was the Kōloa Sugar Company, plantation sponsored. But then Mr. Manuel Teves, who used to be the plantation office manager, somehow he got control of that. So just like he was sponsoring that afterward. I don't know when he started to operate the Kōloa Movie Theater, too. I think the movie theater was at first operated by the Kōloa Athletic Club. But then, as the years went by, he became the owner.

WN: So after you graduated from high school in 1932, what was your first job?

BE: (Laughs) I graduated in 1932 in June, you see. And well, to begin with, my purpose in going to high school was to get a better job, not to wind up in a cane field. But those were depression days, so [Takeshi] "Bear" Kure asked me if I wanted to go with him to ask the plantation manager for a job. Well, Bear was all right, because he took (a) commercial course, but I took college prep. And when I was a junior, my father told me, "Well, don't figure on going on to college because our store is doing poorly, and I'm in bad health, so you be lucky if you can finish high school." So then my senior year I had to change, you know. Take up typing and bookkeeping, like that, to salvage something out of my high school days. So Bear was well qualified to ask for an office job, but he wasn't good enough to ask for both of us. (Laughs) Both of us went to see John T. Moir. By the way, that was his last year as Kōloa manager.

WN: How come you had to go to the head, number one man? Could you have gone to somebody else. . .

BE: No, well, if you went to the top, you're going to get the answer right there, so. Went to see him, both of us. And we told him we were looking for office jobs. (Laughs) So he said, "Well, these are depression days, and if you want work, then you start at the bottom."

So we said, "Okay, we'll take it."

And we (laughs) got what they call hāpai kō, which is---can't be anything lower than that. You carry cane, you know. They still had trains, those days, so he and I were partners. And well, maybe we lasted about three weeks, I think. Then Bear told me that he had a chance to work in the Kōloa Sugar Mill because his father was already an old-timer in the mill. And there was an opening only for one man, so he got the job and then I didn't have a partner, so I had to quit.

WN: Oh, how come you need a partner?

BE: Well, cane loading you work by partners. So I quit and then September 1 I started to work for Kaua'i Motors.

WN: So what exactly did you do, hāpai kō?

BE: Well, you actually carry the bundle of cane on your shoulder, and then you walk up the plank, and unload the cane in the cane car. They assigned a car to us. Actually I don't know how many pounds each load would weigh, but was a pretty big bundle, and boy, the cane was burned cane, eh. So it's greasy, and it's really dirty work. And they still had ashes clinging on the cane, too, from the leaves. So it's dusty, too. Grimy. Really, it's tough work. And the cane cars are not always on the level spot, you know, sometimes it's hilly. So then you struggle more when you climb up the plank with a load.

WN: You said you had partners. What, you folks were both carrying cane, or one of you were bundling, or something like that?

BE: Yeah. We would make several bundles and then we would carry. So both of us would be doing the same kind of work. It's not only I bundle, and then he carry.

WN: How much did you get paid for that?

BE: Well, I think maybe about a dollar a day each, I think. About that anyway. So when I got my first job at Kaua'i Motors, my salary was twenty-five dollars a month. (Laughs) It's something like a dollar a day. Then, of course, President Roosevelt got in, and he started the National Recovery Act, so pretty soon the companies were forced to raise our pay. So my twenty-five dollar salary went up to about thirty-four or thirty-five dollars.

WN: How did you get the job at Kaua'i Motors?

BE: Well, I went to see a Mr. Dan Foster because I heard that one of the outside parts men was going to leave the company to go to the Mainland. So I went in, and then the boss told me that, "Well, this job is not only going out on the road to take orders. You have to fill in your own orders, and sometimes you have to help at the service station pump." So I remember sometimes we used to work on Saturdays, too.

WN: So where was Kaua'i Motors, exactly?

BE: Well, it's in a spot which is now occupied by the Kōloa Chevron [Service] Station.

WN: Right on the corner [of Kōloa and Po'ipū Roads]?

BE: Yeah, right in the corner. In 1932, Kaua'i Motors already was the only General Motors dealer, so they carried Chevrolet, and Pontiac, Buick, Cadillac, the whole line. Before that, Kaua'i Motors used to be a Studebaker dealer, too. But in 1932, they didn't have Studebaker, strictly General Motors cars.

WN: How did Kaua'i Motors get started?

BE: Well, there was an insurance salesman. Of course he ended up insurance salesman, but. . . . A man name Samuro Ichinose, he and. . . . Chinese bookkeeper at Ford agency, I forgot his name, now. Both of them got together and then started Kaua'i Motor Company.

WN: When? Do you know when?

BE: I think it's about 1926, '27, yeah.

WN: And they started in Kōloa?

BE: Well, I remember this Mr. Ichinose had a chicken farm in Lāwa'i. And there was a huge warehouse that he used to put cars in. But I heard that that wasn't the beginning, there was someplace else. But from that Lāwa'i chicken warehouse, he moved down to Kōloa. And I know that, I think he started in Kōloa at what is now the Sueoka Store.

WN: Oh, so right almost next. . .

BE: Well, right on that spot there.

WN: So they started where Sueoka's is now, and later on they moved toward where the Chevron is?

BE: Yeah, right. Because I know when the 1929 Chevrolet six-cylinder cars came in. That's the first time that Chevrolet had a six-cylinder car, and that was the year that I saw that it was displayed over there where Sueoka is now.

WN: So between '29 and '32 they moved?

BE: Right, yeah. I don't know who built the Kaua'i Motors building at the new site, you know, where the Chevron station is now. I don't know who built that building, whether it was the Waterhouse estate, or Mr. Ichinose and his partner. But maybe in about 1930 or '29, they sold out to Mr. Jack Sheehan.

WN: You mean Ichinose?

BE: Yeah, they sold out to Mr. Jack Sheehan, who used to be some kind of official with the General Motors agency, you know. I think, in the past I know the new vehicles were on consignment, you know. So General Motors would send down men to check the inventory from time to time to see if the cars that were reported sold were sold, and those not reported were still on the inventory, you see. So they had to check from time to time, and I think that was Mr. Sheehan's job. So that's when he decided to buy Kaua'i Motors.

WN: Did you sell cars, too, or just parts?

BE: No, no I didn't sell cars. Only parts. In the beginning, well, our parts department handled tires, too. So parts, tires, batteries, and beginning in 1934, I think, our parts manager, Mr. Dan Foster, he went to the Mainland and then he talked to a lot of the Mainland wholesalers, so we could buy parts directly from these people. And we branched out into other lines of truck and trailer merchandise, you know. So we didn't stick to only parts. I know at one time we even handled Caterpillar parts, although not manufactured by the Caterpillar Company, by some other outfits that claimed that their parts were just as good, but cheaper. So for a number of years we handled even the track rollers, and, you know, the big parts. Then, of course, we handled lot of cane trailer parts. You know those big cane, bulk sugar, bulk cane trailers? Then we handled bearings, and sprockets, and chains for the sugar mill and pineapple mills. Industrial belts. In fact we were the only automobile company that diversified that early, into all kind of stuff. And I also know we had a business machine department. Handle typewriters. And we had an appliance department, that's right. I think that was GE, I think.

WN: This was all in Kōloa. . .

BE: Yeah.

WN: . . . or were there branches all over Kaua'i?

BE: No. Only in Kōloa.

WN: So the place must have been big.

BE: Yeah, it was big. Yeah, we had a business-machine department and had about six employees, and the repairman would go to the plantation offices to repair their calculators and all that.

WN: So plantation was one of your biggest customers?

BE: Oh, yeah, they were the biggest. . . .

WN: And as parts salesman, you handled not only automobile parts, but Caterpillar and whatever?

BE: Yeah, all kinds of parts. So in a way that was good for me, too, because I learned more, had more responsibilities. Because later on, I think it was 1967 or '66, Kaua'i Motors sold us, just the parts department alone, to C. Brewer. And C. Brewer called us Wailua Company. And we operated out of the Kaua'i Pineapple cannery warehouse in Lāwa'i. It was a huge warehouse.

WN: Was it warehouse or the cannery, itself?

BE: No, the cannery warehouse. It was all in one spot, same spot, in Lāwa'i. So Wailua Company operated for four years and then C. Brewer decided to sell out, so then they sold us to Pacific

Service and Development Company, which was formed by four people, four partners. And that was in December of 1969, I think. So we were still in Lāwā'i, and I think sometime in 1970 we moved to a new location in the Līhu'e industrial district, into a building that was constructed by. . . . Let's see now. . . . Man named Kamimura, and this Mr. Kamimura was an instructor at the Kaua'i Community College. Oh yeah, he was a welding instructor, that's right. And he had the foresight to lease the land and go ahead and build this huge building and then we rented that building from him. I don't know the size, but it was a huge building. So now, when we got to Līhu'e, we operated a tire recapping plant, too. So it was parts, tire recapping plant, and then later on we became. . . . Oh, let's see now, parts representatives for the Peterbuilt Truck, you know, in competition with the Kenworth Truck. And then later on when the local Kenworth agency gave up, then we handled the Kenworth Truck, too. So we sold a lot of big stuff, trucks, sugar trailers. . . .

WN: So when you---in the early part when you first started, how did you go around? I mean, did you go to them?

BE: On the road, you mean?

WN: Yeah, how did that work?

BE: I know the parts salesman before me used to go around the plantations in a Chevrolet Coupe, you know, small coupe, and then we had a, just like a van, delivery truck.

WN: So like, you would go around, take orders?

BE: Yeah. Go around in a small car, and whatever small parts you could deliver, well, you took 'em with you, see. And lot of times, well, the parts are big, so the trucks had to deliver.

WN: So you would go just to businesses, or to homes, too?

BE: No, no, only business. Plantations, the service stations, like that. Then I used to drop in (on) the schools. . .

WN: Just Kōloa, or. . .

BE: No, no. One day I would go as far as Kekaha. And then the next day I would go, in the old days I used to go once a week as far as Hanalei. There were two or three places that used to buy from us, so. Then of course, Kīlauea Sugar Company was operating those days, see, so at least once a week I called on Kīlauea Sugar Company.

WN: So you folks were the only ones on the island, then?

BE: No. We had competition from Garden Island Motors.

WN: Oh, Garden Island Motors. In Līhu'e?

BE: Yeah, they were the Ford people. And then Von Hamm-Young used to operate their branch on Kaua'i, too.

WN: Where, in Līhu'e, too?

BE: Well, in the beginning, it was Kapa'a, but they moved to Līhu'e, see. Then we had some competition from independent people that started to operate parts houses like Taba Brothers in Kalāheo, and who else? Well, they're the biggest outsider, anyway.

WN: Oh, I see, so Kaua'i Motors was mainly General Motors?

BE: Yeah.

WN: And Garden Island was mainly Ford?

BE: Ford, yeah.

WN: I see. Did they have Chrysler/Plymouth?

BE: Oh, yeah, that's right. Chrysler/Plymouth was Waimea Garage. That was in Waimea, see. But Waimea Garage only had a small parts department.

WN: But did these other businesses do like the Caterpillar or the plantation, sugar vehicles?

BE: Well, like Caterpillar, they had their own branch. I don't know what year, but they built their own parts department and tractor repair shop in Līhu'e on a hill overlooking the Nāwiliwili Harbor. I don't know what year that was, but. . . And then in the industrial district in Nāwiliwili, International Tractor and Trucks, they had their own repair shop and parts department.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: So when you started in 1932 for Kaua'i Motors, what was your first job?

BE: Well, I started in September, and I didn't go on the road until December. I had to be taught how to sell and all that, so. So I used to wait on the counter to sell parts, and the man who became my brother-in-law later used to be the assistant parts manager. Minoru Okuda. And he volunteered to teach me at night, so at night we used to go down to Kaua'i Motors, and then study the parts books. He would explain to me how to look up parts and how to identify what model, and all that. I really had to study.

WN: Did you know anything about cars before that?

BE: No, I didn't. Of course, we owned a Model-T Ford, but as far as parts, I didn't know anything about parts. So I owe a lot to Okuda and Mr. Dan Foster. They were real good teachers.

In the old days, one of the hardest things for us was the fact that we didn't have a regular delivery service every day, see. So if Lihu'e Plantation called for a certain part we had to catch somebody to [deliver it]. Only if it was huge part, then we would send a special truck. Other than that, if they wanted a set of gaskets, or some minor stuff, we won't make a special trip, you see. So we had to catch the car salesman or somebody to at least drop 'em off close to where their Lihu'e shop is. So that was one of the hardest things to do, to ask people all the time, "Oh, how about taking this for us?" Yeah, that was rough.

WN: How did you get the job?

BE: Well, as I said, I applied to. . . . Since I heard that this man was going to leave the company.

WN: Oh yeah, okay, I already asked you that.

BE: Yeah.

WN: Did you get commission, too?

BE: Not in the beginning. I don't know what period, but as I said, we used to operate a tire recapping plant, too. Of course, we sold new tires, too. And during certain periods when the business was down, the boss would say, "Well, okay now, we will give employees, let's say, 10 percent of any recapping business that they brought in," and all that, so. That was really good because then you hustled for business, see. And if you got 10 percent, that was real big money. I don't recall any time that they said, "Well, okay, this month we going to give you commission," other than that, see. But for a number of years we had---they must have made good profit, because we got good bonus. I don't know if all the employees, you know, the parts people, got the bonus, or only the salesmen and the supervisors, or what. But yeah, I got good bonus.

WN: So when you started at Kaua'i Motors, where were you living?

BE: Let's see now. Well, I was still living in the old store. And then we moved into a rented house the following year. Because we shut down the store in 1933. And it just happens that we moved into a rented house which is exactly next door to where we are living now. You know where our home is?

WN: Puni Road?

BE: Yeah, on Puni Road. Well, we rented a home from Mr. Costa. And the Costa family is our neighbor over there.

WN: You mean Mary Costa's. . . . Related to Mary Costa?

BE: Well, this is Frank Costa, so. . . . Mary Costa is their grandma. Because they used to own the whole area over there, see. So 1933 until 1940. . . . Yeah, we lived in that house. And then 1941 we moved to Panau Tract, which is the area right below Kōloa School.

WN: You were there all the way until you bought your present place?

BE: Yeah.

WM: Last year?

BE: Until 1984.

WN: So up until 1933 you lived in that old store?

BE: In that old store, yeah.

WN: So after your store closed down, what did your father do?

BE: Well, my father came down with asthma, anyway, so when he was healthy, he used to concentrate on raising string beans which he supplied to Kōloa [Plantation] Store. Not too much, but you know, backyard operation. . . .

WN: When the [Ebata] Store shut down, what was there after that?

BE: Well, I don't know what. . . . That building remained there for a while, you know. And the owner must have sold out to the plantation, Mr. Jardin.

WN: Oh, Jardin owned the . . .

BE: Yeah, that property used to be Jardin's property.

WN: Did Jardin used to own most of the land that Japanese camp was on?

BE: No, no, no, no. He owned the property which is now [Bienvenido] Doctor's care home. And there's a Mrs. Kondo. That small area there, and the pasture in the back, that was owned by Mr. Jardin, plus our building area. But Mr. Jardin must have been about sixty-five, already, in the old days. So I think he must have sold out to the plantation.

WN: So you retired from Kaua'i Motors in. . .

BE: Nineteen seventy-eight.

WN: Nineteen seventy-eight. . . . So you're a life-long resident of Kōloa, right?

BE: Life-long, yeah.

WN: How do you feel about the changes that have taken place?

BE: I would say, big changes, you know. Especially the Po'ipū area. I didn't dream that it would develop to that extent. If we had any kind of inkling that the development going be that big, well, we would have invested in real property instead of fooling around with the stock market.

(Laughter)

WN: Do you feel Kōloa is a different kind of place from other places?

BE: I would say that Kōloa has a big potential, you know. They are in a really good spot. . . . Because already . . .

WN: You mean with the beach and everything?

BE: Yeah, because the people are used to the fact that the sugar company went under already, you know. Kōloa people are used to the fact that the plantations are not going to last too long, eh. Because Kōloa Sugar went under and Grove Farm took over, now McBryde follows suit, so. . . . So in their mind, they are not dependent only on sugar already.

WN: So you think the future of the sugar industry is pretty dim?

BE: Yeah, because like, what's his name now? President Roosevelt---not Roosevelt, but Reagan is not too fond of the subsidies. Especially the sugar subsidy. (Laughs) They want to chop that down to maybe from eighteen cents to twelve cents, or something. And the other countries are still dumping cheap sugar in the U.S. market, so you not going to have protection all around.

WN: What do you think would happen if sugar went down? You know, what would Kōloa be like?

BE: Well, right now, anyway, a lot of Kōloa people (are) getting their income from the hotel area, so. . . . I don't think it's going to be a total disaster. I don't know how many percent of Kōloa people are dependent on sugar, you know, because a lot of people are working for the county. Well, it would have an effect, of course, if sugar go down, but not like some area that's totally dependent on sugar. See like, this morning's news, they said the Waialua Sugar [Company on O'ahu] is giving a warning now. Two years more and the possibility is good that they are going to shut down, so. In an area like that, well it's going to be real bad.

WN: How did Hurricane Iwa affect you?

BE: Personally, I was lucky, because only a small amount of damage. Maybe about two or three thousand dollar worth of damage, that's all.

WN: What kind of damage?

BE: Well, we had our hothouse carried away. And some of the roofing from our 'Ōma'o place, the garage area, that was torn off. And from our place down at Panau Tract, our rental house roofing, some areas were damaged. So, it wasn't that bad, yeah. But a lot of people suffered real severe damage.

WN: I have one more question. You know a lot of people from this area, they moved away from Kōloa, you know, some people live in Honolulu, or different parts of the island. You're in Kōloa and you've always been in Kōloa. How come you've never left?

BE: Well, in the first place, I don't like to change, you know. Change job and. . . . Of course, that was foolish, but (laughs) like I could have moved to the county, you know. One of the influential people told me, he could put me in the county. But, of course in the early days, county jobs were not rated high. That's another reason, too. If possible, I didn't want to change around jobs, that's why. I remember my wife telling me, better for me to quit the company and then start my own business. Because she was teaching and the family didn't have to depend on me. So I could take a chance and start my own business, but no, I didn't want to change job. I was offered a job at Von Hamm-Young, anyway. But well, the inducements were good, but I (was) lucky I didn't take the job because in about two or three years later that department folded up, so. . . . Then they had Command Bearing Company, they have a branch on Kaua'i now, and it used to be Bitco Company selling bearings of all kinds for the automotive business and the sugar mills. Chains, sprockets, like that. And they wanted me to take over the Kaua'i branch. I think I knew enough about the business, but I didn't want to gamble my secure job.

WN: Do you consider yourself fortunate to be born and raised in Kōloa?

BE: Yeah, I think so. I never wished that, "Oh, I wish that I had been born in Honolulu," or, you know. Well, let's say that I'm easily satisfied.

(Laughter)

BE: No ambition.

WN: Well, before I turn off the tape recorder, you have any last things you want to say?

BE: That's why I cannot squawk when my own son is not ambitious, you know. He goes to college and then winds up mail carrier, and he's happy, so. I can't squawk because I'm not ambitious myself.

WN: Well, what's good about living in Kōloa?

BE: Well, on the average, I would say we have friendly people over here.

And it's a growing area, and of course the stores are close by so everything is convenient. We have a good school, we have a good library. . . . Yeah, good beaches. I don't fish, but we have good fishing areas. And we have lot of churches, too. (Laughs) Yeah, a lot of churches.

WN: If you were to do anything different in your life, what would you---would you have done anything differently?

BE: Well, I would have gone to the county. (Laughs)

WN: Okay, well, thank you very much.

BE: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

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Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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